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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001560

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: UPDATED ALGERIA DEMOCRATIC REFORM STRATEGY:
PUSHING FOR OPENINGS

REF: A. STATE 130991
[1](#)B. 05 ALGIERS 992
[1](#)C. ALGIERS 966
[1](#)D. ALGIERS 1559
[1](#)E. ALGIERS 1558
[1](#)F. ALGIERS 1091
[1](#)G. ALGIERS 1264 AND ALGIERS 1329

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Securing a wider democratic opening in Algeria is a challenge. Many Algerian young people call the political leadership the "Jurassics" because so many leaders from the President down are entrenched politicians from the same generation that took over after independence in 1962. We see precious few signs that this leadership is rushing to liberalize the system much in the next several years; indeed, there are signs of regression. Political parties, both in the governing coalition and in the opposition, have trouble generating activists or voter interest. There are civil society organizations -- some of which are doing good work -- but nearly all suffer from small memberships, fund-raising difficulties and an inability to expand support for issues beyond a narrow band of true believers. These problems are not new in Algeria, and their persistence has helped sustain Islamist radicals recruitment that itself poses a direct threat to U.S. national security.

[1](#)2. (C) Despite the challenging environment, we have openings. There are Algerians, both in government and outside, who want democratization. For maximum effect, we are integrating Public Diplomacy tools and approaches into other Embassy activities. When combined with other program tools such as MEPI, we believe this will provide the best transformational arsenal possible. Our primary themes for the democratic reform agenda are expanding media freedom, energizing the parliament to play a genuine oversight role, improving delivery of justice and helping the GoA use education and market reform to reduce the lure of radicals in Algeria society. Embassy Algiers' strategy consists of five focus areas to promote democratic reform in Algeria. END SUMMARY.

FOCUS AREA 1: POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

[1](#)3. (C) Our desired outcome is a parliament and judiciary that are more transparent and able to play genuine oversight roles in the national life. Using MEPI funds, we will use the

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and PD programs to build a capacity among parliamentarians to (a) analyze budgets (b) use the Algeria media to explain issues to the public and (c) draft legislation. The President of the Chamber of Deputies acknowledged that the parliament needs to be able to do these things (see ref C). Our contacts within various political parties have expressed support for NCSL's work. We have also heard that many within parliament view NCSL as a preferable alternative the National Democratic Institute whose program with six political parties the GoA shut down in the summer of 2006. (We have raised bringing NDI back but no official who is connected to Algeria's top leadership has responded serious to our inquiries. We will keep trying to restore an NDI presence since Algeria badly needs political parties able to generate and channel interest in the political process. Algeria's political parties in turn are struggling with the Interior Ministry - see ref D, for example.)

¶4. (C) Most of our contacts perceives the judicial system is rife with corruption and favoritism; its low credibility adds to the power of the extremist message here. The Justice Minister has asked us for as much help in training as we can provide. We have had a small program through MEPI and the CLDP that has trained judges in faster resolution of commercial disputes. That program has opened doors at the Justice Ministry so that we can broaden our focus to the larger question of judicial ethics and standards. The American Bar Association's work with the MOJ will start in FY2008, and the MEPI CLDP work will continue for at least part of the year. Negotiating a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty with the Algerians would enable us to develop improved access to the MOJ's investigatory machinery. We also aim to

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channel FBI and DS training opportunities to the Justice Ministry and, if the Minister of Interior (no democracy ally) approves, to the Algerian police to help the Algerians develop more modern and fair law enforcement techniques.

FOCUS AREA 2: MEDIA

¶5. (C) Our desired outcome is more media freedom and better quality media. We have pressed in private with the Algerians that they should start opening the electronic media sooner, not later. Moreover, we continue to see defamation cases raised against journalists who write about corruption (see ref E, for example). The independent press often practices self-censorship due to the possible penalties from such defamation cases. We will use PD resources to highlight the abuse of defamation laws and partner with journalists and civil society to bring about positive change. We also hope to secure DRL Bureau funding for a proposed program with Freedom House whose primary focus should be developing an Algerian campaign that presses for decriminalization of defamation. Separately, in FY 2008 we will continue to support the MEPI-funded Journalism Development Group (JDG) work with Algerian newspapers, targeting their business skills as a mechanism through which transparency and accountability can be increased. After the business and management help this project delivered to Echourouq el-Youmi and el-Fadjr newspapers in FY 2007 other newspapers would like to receive similar JDG help.

FOCUS AREA 3: CIVIL SOCIETY

¶6. (C) Our desired outcome is a civil society that is better able to organize and lobby for reform. On paper, there are several thousand civil societies organizations in Algeria, but few have national reach and many seem to exist in name only. Some Algerians suggest that the weakness of civil society in the country is influenced by the ongoing state of

emergency left over from the 1990s civil war, which restricts freedom of assembly. Through ambassadorial and political section engagement, we will work with partners to increase pressure on the government to relax restrictions on freedom of assembly, while using MEPI and PD resources to empower NGOs with fund-raising and greater organizational and technical expertise. We will also work with local NGOs on issues related to trafficking in persons -- an issue the Algerian government has yet to formally acknowledge and address -- as well as on women's rights. Separately, we will encourage Algerian political parties and NGOs to start advocating now for international observers for the 2009 presidential elections. It is important to remember that while Algeria has many earnest activists, it will take many years to establish a strong and vibrant civil society here.

FOCUS AREA 4: EDUCATION

17. (SBU) Our PD and education programs also will help promote democratic values. In FY 2008 we also will expand our classroom visits by Embassy officers outside the capital in the coming year with the creation of American Corners in Oran (Algeria's second city) and Constantine (the center of conservative Islamic thinking). The ACCESS program that targets extra English language instruction to underprivileged high school students has democratization elements in it too. For example, an ACCESS teacher in Constantine told Ambassador in November 2006 that her students were amazed when they studied the U.S. constitution in their ACCESS class that the U.S. has such wide freedom of religion. A program we are proposing, which met with an initially favorable response from Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education officials during the recent visit of S/P Jared Cohen, is the "Teach for Algeria" initiative. This program will not only improve English teaching in Algeria but would also involve Algerian students in volunteer community projects to help instill a sense of civic duty.

18. (SBU) We are especially mindful in Algeria in 2007 of the
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need to help the GoA reduce the lure of extremism. As we have reported, the suicide bombers seen here in 2007 have all been from lower economic classes with little hope of advancement (see ref F-G). Improving English language teaching is important since job applicants with good English enjoy an advantage in the Algerian job market. With strong encouragement from the GoA we will maintain English-language teaching programs, such as the ACCESS program. The MEPI-funded Partnership for Public Schools (PSP) program has major components dedicated to improving the English-language teaching methodology used in Algerian schools. ECA programming, such as Fulbright, is also helping us improve the ability of Algerian administrators to address the vital need for reform in education.

FOCUS AREA 5: ECONOMIC REFORM

19. (C) Countering radicalism and promoting democracy is only one side of an Algerian coin whose other side has to be a successful economy that generates sustainable employment. The MEPI-funded Financial Services Volunteer Corps workshops and a separate Treasury Department project will help the GoA reform its atrophied banking sector. Perhaps the biggest impediment to a healthier business climate and the economic opportunism it would bring is the lack of transparency in the Algerian economy, whether in the granting of credit, access to land, or the awarding of tenders. Programs to address this key structural shortcoming would help non-hydrocarbon investment and encourage more Algerians to become stakeholders in the country's future.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) As we have reported, there is little movement on political reform now outside openings such as those we outlined above. Indeed, some of the initial signs from the local election preparations suggest backward movement. Our transformational opportunities are likely to increase only when we have the blessing of the GoA and remain prepared to deploy greater resources whenever we see an opening for political and economic reform. One such opening might come in the 2009 presidential election here if there is enough disagreement among the Algerian security and political leadership that a genuine contest proves possible. Embassy Algiers is already discussing quietly with political activists about the utility of international observers for the 2009 presidential elections, and if we ultimately get an opening, as we did in 1995 and 2004 we should have resources ready to capitalize.

FORD